



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

January 14, 2005

Mr. Robert Russo  
Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Schulze & Aldridge, PC  
P.O. Box 460606  
San Antonio, Texas 78246-0606

OR2005-00509

Dear Mr. Russo:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 217034.

The Stockdale Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request from the State Board for Educator Certification for specified categories of employment information concerning a named individual, including (1) reports, notes, statements, or memoranda that reflect a chronology of the conduct reported or the district's investigation of the incident; (2) the individual's application for employment and any documents submitted in support of the application; (3) any information that evidences administrative reprimands or other disciplinary measures; (4) any documentation relating to the individual's employment; (5) the individual's teacher service record; and (6) any other document that may be relevant to SBEC's investigation of the individual. You state that the district has provided the requestor with a portion of the requested information. You claim, however, that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.026, 552.101, 552.102, 552.107, 552.114, 552.117, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.107(1) protects information that is encompassed by the attorney-client privilege. *See* Gov't Code § 552.107(1). When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body maintains the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. *See* Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information

constitutes or documents a communication. *See id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made “for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services” to the client governmental body. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *See In re Texas Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element.

Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a confidential communication, *see id.* 503(b)(1), meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.” *See id.* 503(a)(5). Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the intent of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *See Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, no writ). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein). Based on your representations and our review of the information at issue, we agree that pages 113 - 145 and 160 - 250 constitute communications exchanged between privileged parties in furtherance of the rendition of legal services to a client. Accordingly, we conclude that the district may withhold pages 113 - 145 and 160 - 250 pursuant to section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.<sup>1</sup> However, we find that you have not demonstrated that any of the remaining submitted information constitutes or documents a communication between attorneys representing the district and district employees. Therefore, you may not withhold the remaining submitted information under section 552.107.

Section 552.114 excepts from disclosure student records at an educational institution funded completely or in part by state revenue. Gov’t Code § 552.114. This office generally applies the same analysis under section 552.114 and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

---

<sup>1</sup> As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments regarding this information.

of 1974 ("FERPA").<sup>2</sup> See Open Records Decision No. 539 (1990). FERPA provides that no federal funds will be made available under any applicable program to an educational agency or institution that releases personally identifiable information (other than directory information) contained in a student's education records to anyone but certain enumerated federal, state, and local officials and institutions, unless otherwise authorized by the student's parent. See 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1). "Education records" means those records that contain information directly related to a student and are maintained by an educational agency or institution or by a person acting for such agency or institution. *Id.* § 1232g(a)(4)(A). Section 552.026 of the Government Code provides that "information contained in education records of an educational agency or institution" may only be released under the Act in accordance with FERPA.

In Open Records Decision No. 634 (1995), this office concluded that (1) an educational agency or institution may withhold from public disclosure information that is protected by FERPA and excepted from required public disclosure by sections 552.026 and 552.101 without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision as to those exceptions, and (2) an educational agency or institution that is state-funded may withhold from public disclosure information that is excepted from required public disclosure by section 552.114 as a "student record," insofar as the "student record" is protected by FERPA, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision as to that exception. See Open Records Decision No. 634 at 6-8 (1995). In this instance, you have submitted this information for our review. Accordingly, we will address your claim.

Information must be withheld from required public disclosure under FERPA only to the extent "reasonable and necessary to avoid personally identifying a particular student." See Open Records Decision Nos. 332 (1982), 206 (1978). Such information includes both information that directly identifies a student, as well as information that, if released, would allow the student's identity to be easily traced. See Open Records Decision No. 224 (1979) (finding student's handwritten comments protected under FERPA because they make identity of student easily traceable through handwriting, style of expression, or particular incidents related). Based on your arguments, and our review of the remaining information at issue, we find that portions of this information, which we have marked, must be redacted pursuant to section 552.114 and FERPA.

We note that the submitted documents include an Employment Eligibility Verification, form I-9, with attachment. Form I-9 is governed by section 1324a of title 8 of the United States Code, which provides that an I-9 form and "any information contained in or appended to such form, may not be used for purposes other than for enforcement of this chapter" and

---

<sup>2</sup> Section 552.101 excepts from required public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision," and incorporates confidentiality provisions such as FERPA into the Public Information Act (the "Act"). Gov't Code § 552.101.

for enforcement of other federal statutes governing crime and criminal investigations. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1324a(b)(5); *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 274a.2(b)(4). Release of the I-9 form and attachment in this instance would be “for purposes other than for enforcement” of the referenced federal statutes. Accordingly, we conclude that the I-9 form and attachment are confidential and may only be released in compliance with the federal laws and regulations governing the employment verification system.

The district asserts that the submitted transcripts are subject to section 552.102(b) of the Government Code. Section 552.102(b) excepts from disclosure most information on a transcript from an institution of higher education maintained in the personnel files of professional public school employees. Gov’t Code § 552.102(b). Section 552.102(b) excepts from disclosure all information from transcripts other than the employee’s name, the courses taken, and the degree obtained. Open Records Decision No. 526 (1989). Thus, with the exception of the employee’s name, the courses taken, and the degree obtained, which the district states it has already provided the requestor, the district must withhold the information in the submitted transcripts pursuant to section 552.102(b).

The district also raises section 552.117 of the Government Code. Section 552.117 excepts from disclosure the home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who timely request that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.117(a)(1). However, information subject to section 552.117(a)(1) may not be withheld from disclosure if the current or former employee made the request for confidentiality under section 552.024 after the request for information at issue was received by the governmental body. Whether a particular piece of information is public must be determined at the time the request for it is received by the governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Among the submitted documents is a copy of the form in which this employee has timely elected to keep her home address, home phone number, social security number, and family member information confidential prior to the date on which the district received this request. Accordingly, you must withhold the information we have marked in the remaining submitted information under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code for this employee.

We note, however, that an individual’s personal post office box number is not a “home address” under section 552.117 and therefore may not be withheld under this exception. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.117; Open Records Decision No. 622 at 4 (1994) (legislative history of Gov’t Code § 552.117(a)(1) makes clear that its purpose is to protect public employees from being harassed *at home*) (citing House Committee on State Affairs, Bill Analysis, H.B. 1976, 69th Leg. (1985); Senate Committee on State Affairs, Bill Analysis, H.B. 1976, 69th Leg. (1985)) (emphasis added); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 658 at 4 (1998) (statutory confidentiality provision must be express and cannot be implied), 478 at 2 (1987) (language of confidentiality statute controls scope of protection), 465 at 4-5 (1987) (statute explicitly required confidentiality).

Section 552.130 of the Government Code prohibits the release of information that relates to a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state or a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state. *See Gov't Code § 552.130.* Accordingly, the district must withhold the driver's license information we have marked pursuant to section 552.130 of the Government Code.

Finally, we note that an e-mail address that is contained within the remaining submitted information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.137 of the Government Code. Section 552.137 provides:

(a) Except as otherwise provided by this section, an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body is confidential and not subject to disclosure under this chapter.

(b) Confidential information described by this section that relates to a member of the public may be disclosed if the member of the public affirmatively consents to its release.

(c) Subsection (a) does not apply to an e-mail address:

(1) provided to a governmental body by a person who has a contractual relationship with the governmental body or by the contractor's agent;

(2) provided to a governmental body by a vendor who seeks to contract with the governmental body or by the vendor's agent;

(3) contained in a response to a request for bids or proposals, contained in a response to similar invitations soliciting offers or information relating to a potential contract, or provided to a governmental body in the course of negotiating the terms of a contract or potential contract; or

(4) provided to a governmental body on a letterhead, coversheet, printed document, or other document made available to the public.

(d) Subsection (a) does not prevent a governmental body from disclosing an e-mail address for any reason to another governmental body or to a federal agency.

Gov't Code § 552.137. Section 552.137 requires a governmental body to withhold certain e-mail addresses of members of the public that are provided for the purpose of

communicating electronically with the governmental body, unless the members of the public with whom the e-mail addresses are associated have affirmatively consented to their release. Section 552.137 does not apply to a government employee's work e-mail address or a business's general e-mail address or web address. E-mail addresses that are encompassed by subsection 552.137(c) are also not excepted from disclosure under section 552.137. We have marked the e-mail address that is excepted from disclosure under section 552.137(a). Unless the district has received affirmative consent for the release of this address, it must withhold the address pursuant to section 552.137 of the Government Code.

In summary, the district may withhold pages 113 - 145 and 160 - 250 pursuant to section 552.107 of the Government Code. We conclude that the district must withhold the student identifying information we have marked pursuant to section 552.114 and FERPA, and the submitted transcripts pursuant to section 552.102(b) of the Government Code. The submitted I-9 form and attachment are confidential and may only be released in compliance with the federal laws and regulations governing the employment verification system. Additionally, we conclude that the district must withhold the information we have marked under sections 552.117(a)(1), 552.130, and 552.137 of the Government Code. All remaining information must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free,

at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Lauren E. Kleine  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LEK/jev

Ref: ID# 217034

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Tracy Thomas  
Staff Investigator  
State Board for Educator Certification  
Capitol Station  
P.O. Box 12728  
Austin, Texas 78711-2728  
(w/o enclosures)